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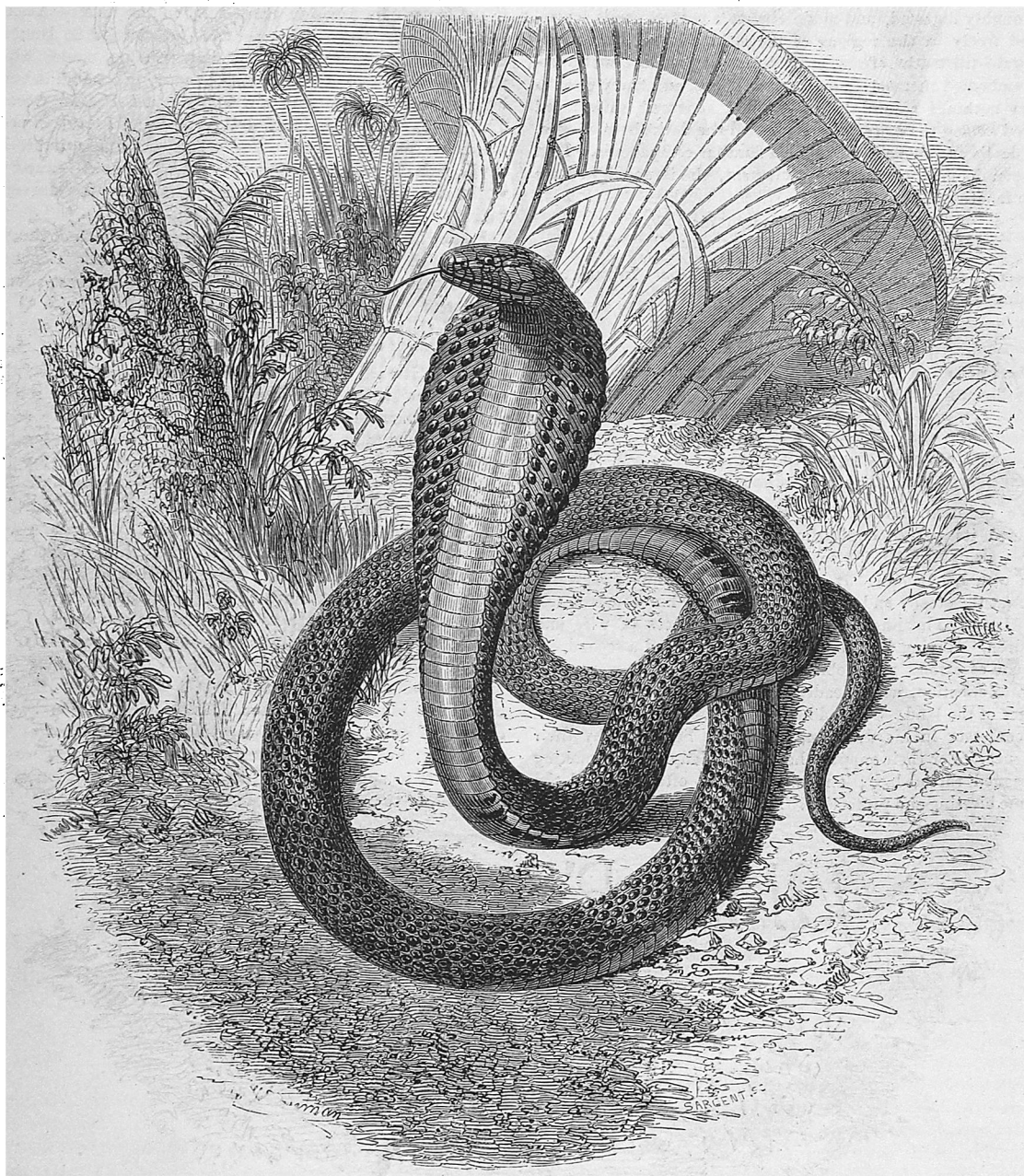
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## THE HAJA AND COBRA DI CAPELLO.

On a morning in October last, one of the keepers at the Zoological Gardens, Regent's-park, London, named Gurling, returned to his duties in a state very nearly approaching drunkenness, after having spent the night, in a carousal at a tavern, with some emigrants who were about to set out for Australia. Upon entering the garden, he opened one of the glass cages,

passing at the moment, implored him to desist, but he replied in an excited manner, "I'm inspired!" He then replaced the serpent, and exclaiming, "Now for the Cobra!" and sliding back the glass door of its cage, found the animal slightly torpid by the cold of the preceding night. He took it out, and revived it by holding it against his breast inside his



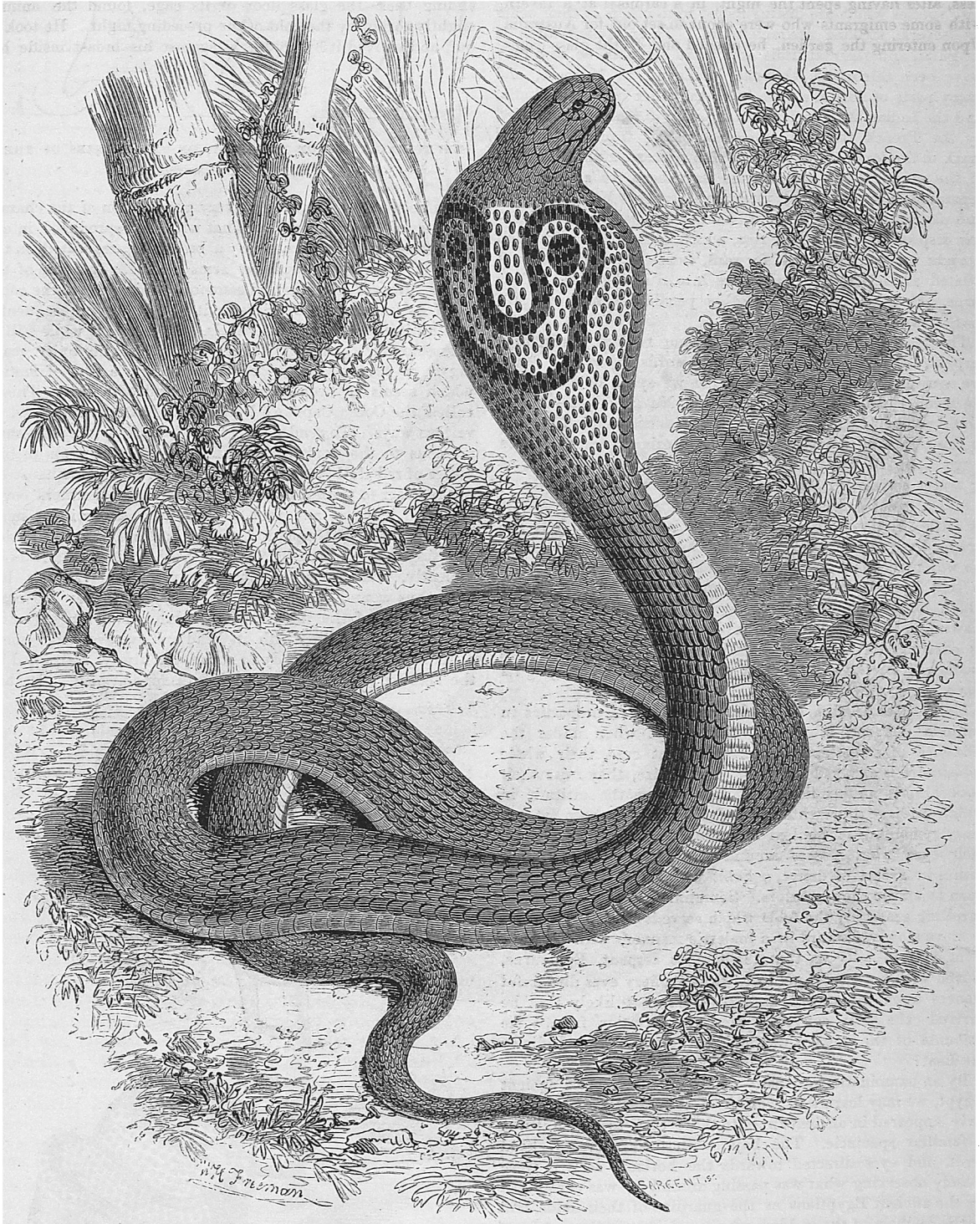
THE HAJA.

with an iron grating, in which the venomous serpents are enclosed, and taking out one of them which had recently arrived from Morocco, he shook it above his head, in imitation of the Indian serpent charmers, some of whom he had seen in London during the Great Exhibition. The serpent wound itself, it appears, around Gurling's neck, but without doing him any harm; one of the other keepers, who chanced to be

waistcoat. He then held it in his two hands, and began to wave it to and fro, as he had done with the other serpent, but it suddenly dashed forward its head and struck him like lightning between the eyes, inflicting two wounds, one at each side of his nose, somewhat resembling punctures made by a needle. The blood began to flow freely, and Gurling, as if suddenly brought back to a sense of the danger of his position, and of

the folly of which he had been guilty, called loudly for assistance, and replaced the cobra in its cage. A keeper, who was close at hand, ran to the spot, and found him sitting on a chair, silent and motionless. He was placed in a cab in a state of

finger, at the same time groaning heavily. He first lost his voice, then his sight, and last of all his hearing. His pulse gradually became feeble, and his extremities cold and insensible to the touch. An attempt was made to restore the respiration



COBRA DI CAPELLO.

stupor, and conveyed to the hospital. The only words he uttered were that he was sure he would not live. On his arrival at the hospital, he was found to be utterly paralysed, so that he could not hold up his head even; his face was livid, and his breathing short. He pointed to his throat with his

by artificial means; galvanism was also tried, but in vain; and he expired without convulsion in one hour and a half after receiving the wound. The coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the facts of the case.

The English newspapers for some time after teemed with

comments upon the occurrence, and antidotes from all quarters were laid before the public. No detailed and accurate account of the cobra, however, has yet been published, and we think some of the principal details concerning it may not be unacceptable to our readers.

The two animals represented in our engravings belong to two species which are distinguished from others of their order by several striking characteristics. Their conformation is singular, and their attitude still more singular, so that they have been celebrated, the one in Egypt, in Morocco, and many parts of Africa, as the *haja*; the other in Persia, India, and the Indian Archipelago, as the *cobra di capello*, and called by the French the "spectacled serpent," from the curious mark in the form of spectacles which appear on the back part of the neck. These two species have been for a long time separated from the other venomous serpents by naturalists, and placed in a distinct genus, *naia*, characterised by a peculiar disposition of the first ribs, which enable it to raise itself upright and to carry itself forward, hence the neck becomes dilated at the animal's pleasure into a circle more or less large. But the *naia*s have another peculiarity, and one still more remarkable.

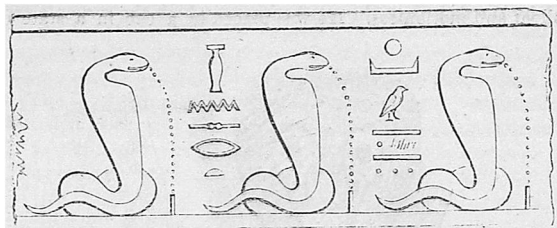
The leading characteristic, as all our readers know, of a serpent, is that it creeps. The Latin words *serpere* and *repere* are equivalent in meaning, and when we speak of a serpent, we mean literally a *creeping animal*. No appellation in the whole nomenclature of natural history has been so well applied as this. Not only, in the words of the original curse, "does it go upon its belly, and eat dust," but whether on land or water, swimming, climbing, or advancing horizontally, it is still a *reptile*. In ascending a tree it makes its way little by little, by the help of the folds of its body which it has wrapped around the trunk or branches; in passing through the water, it makes use of an undulating motion very similar to that by which it progresses upon the dry ground, and which must be familiar to every one who has seen a worm crawling. Even in securing its prey, also, it creeps upon its victim, smothering him in the folds of its body, and swallows it by the same sort of motion as when changing its place.

The *haja* and *cobra di capello* possess these properties in common with all other serpents, except when under the influence of some excitement. In that case, their whole appearance is changed; they increase in size, they raise their neck almost perpendicularly, and assume the attitude in which we have represented them. They may be seen, at one time, remaining motionless for whole hours, following with their eyes what passes around them, then agitating their bodies in a sort of dance, a habit which the jugglers work upon to amuse the spectators. Sometimes, also, the cobra, by unrolling gradually the folds which serve it as a base, is able to move slowly forward in a majestic manner, with its head erect. Ovid tells us that the famous serpent, *Epidaurus*, moved with head erect, and cast from its fiery eyes disdainful glances upon the crowd around. Is it not likely that he derived the idea conveyed in his description from some accounts of the cobra which had reached him from India or the East?

By an examination of many of the monuments of ancient Egypt, we may learn how wonderful this erect posture must have appeared in ancient times to those even to whom it was a familiar spectacle. The *haja*, with neck elevated, head erect, and eyes directed towards the horizon, as if it were closely observing what was passing around it, was considered by the ancient Egyptians as the guardian of their fields, and as the emblem of the goddess who watched over the safety of the universe. Hence in the numerous representations of the serpent which may be seen upon their temples and sarcophagi, it is always in its characteristic attitude, as in our engraving, which is taken from one of the sculptured friezes of the temple of Denderah. In other parts of the same building the *haja* is represented with a lion's head, but always in the same posture.

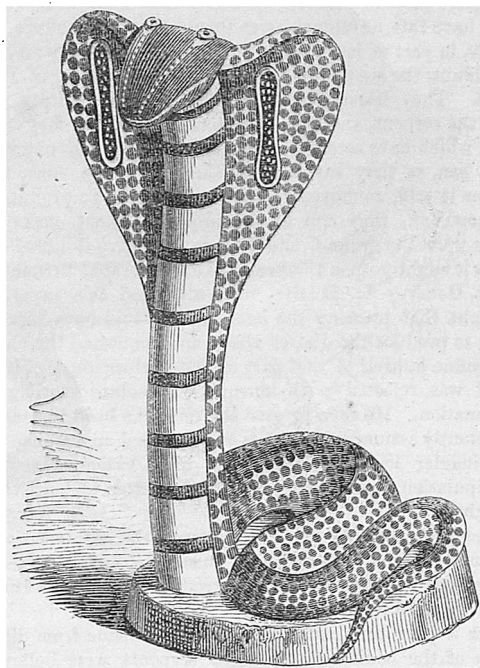
The *cobra di capello* is often represented in the same atti-

tude at the present day in Asia. In India, statuettes, some of very rude workmanship, others displaying more care, may



REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HAJA, ON THE FRIEZES OF THE TEMPLE OF DENDERAH.

often be seen, which convey a very good notion of the characteristics of the genus *naia*. That which is reproduced in our engraving was surmounted by a human figure, seated on the head of the serpent, with the arms crossed. In some of the larger towns it is almost as common a thing to see the cobra itself as its image. Terrible as it is, the jugglers frequently exhibit it at the fairs and festivals, and handle it while still in possession of its venomous fangs with perfect impunity, making it go through, in its upright posture, a sort of motion which seems to keep time to the sound of a flute. This is called the *Cobra Capello's Dance*, and has been explained in various ways. To render their fangs harmless, it is said, that, previous to the performance, the serpents are made to bite pieces of red cloth, until all the venomous saliva is exhausted; but in order to train it to dance, it is said the charmers cover the hand in a jug, and then irritate the animal with a small stick. When it attempts to bite, the hard substance by which the finger is surrounded is presented to it; it strikes it violently, and hurts its muzzle severely. When it has been thus wounded several times, it begins to fear the hand and gestures of the juggler. The cobra is sometimes seen for whole hours following with its head and eye every movement of its master, always ready to strike, but always restrained by the recollection of past pain and disappointment. It thus



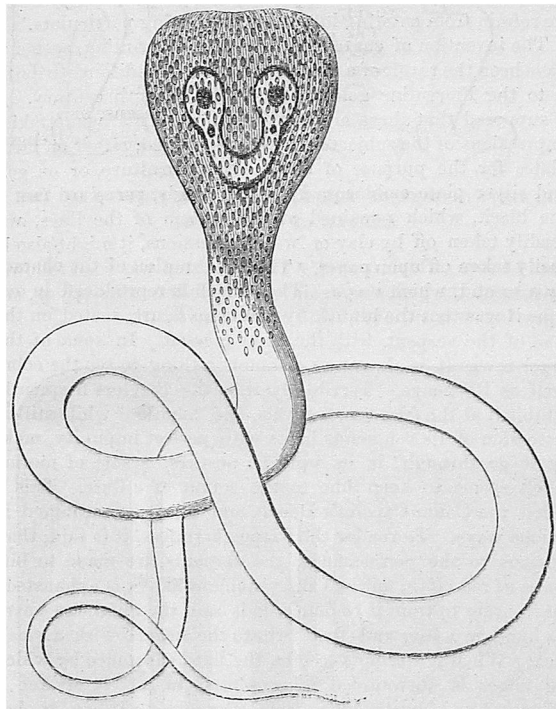
INDIAN STATUETTE OF THE COBRA.

watches closely, and imitates as it can, the motions of the charmer, until the astonished spectators begin to believe that it has been trained to dance in correct time. When the animal begins to be fatigued, the flute ceases to play, and the conjurors



commence the sale of the roots which they allege to possess the power of curing the bite of the snakes.

The correctness of this account is rendered somewhat doubtful by the fact that the performances which the serpents are



COBRA DI CAPELLO, FROM NATURE.

taught to execute differ widely in different parts of the country.

Similar scenes often meet the traveller's eye in Egypt. The charmers there are no less dexterous than those of India, and they have this advantage over them—that they believe themselves, in part at least, what they tell others. They are, without doubt, the successors, if not the descendants, of Pliny's *psylli*. They boast that they possess the hereditary power over the serpent, and it is an undoubted fact that they execute feats which have astonished the ablest European naturalists. They can, as they say, change the *haja* into a stick, that is render it stiff, immovable, and insensible. To produce this phenomenon, they spit in the serpent's throat, make it lie down upon the ground, and then, as if to give it a final order, press it slightly upon the head. The celebrated French naturalist, Geoffrey St. Hilaire, who witnessed this experiment, thought that pressing the head alone would have been sufficient to produce the desired effect, and requested the charmer to confine himself to that part of the performance. His proposal was rejected with horror, as absolute sacrilege and profanation. He then pressed the serpent's head himself, and it instantly assumed the lifeless and petrified appearance which the juggler had produced by a more extended course of manipulation, upon seeing which the latter instantly fled in affright.

The *naïas* surpass most serpents in the virulence of the poison contained in their fangs. In some experiments recently made, the minutest quantity introduced into the skin of a pigeon caused its death in a quarter of an hour.

For a long time various preparations made from different parts of the bodies of venomous serpents were believed to be infallible remedies for a host of maladies, and in particular for the bite of the serpents themselves. In the seventeenth century few people doubted that the viper was an antidote against its own bite.

Many of these popular errors were formerly shared by physicians, but they have been abandoned one by one before

the onward march of science, so that it is now a piece of vain erudition to be acquainted even with their names.

If venomous serpents ever regain the place in medical science which they have lost, it is their poison alone that will restore them. A substance so powerful in its effects upon the animal frame might be, in the hands of science, an agent no less valuable than morphine, strychnine, or prussic acid. Many chemists have recently given much of their attention to experiments intended to ascertain the active principle contained in the venom of serpents; and we are led to hope that their efforts may yet place new resources within the reach of the medical practitioner, and perhaps even discover in the deadly poison of the *naïas* and the rattlesnake, an antidote against the, to us, more terrible virus inoculated by the tooth of the mad dog.

### OXFORDSHIRE LEGEND IN STONE.

A FEW miles from Chipping-Norton, by the side of a road which divides Oxfordshire from Warwickshire, England, and on the brow of a hill overlooking Long Compton, stand the remains of a Druidical temple. Leland speaks of them as "Rollright stones," from their being in the parish of Rollright. The temple consists of a single circle of stones, from fifty to sixty in number, of various sizes and in different positions, but all of them rough, time-worn, and mutilated. The peasantry say that it is impossible to count these stones, and certainly it is a difficult task, though not because there is any witchcraft in the matter, but owing to the peculiar position of some of them. You will hear of a certain baker who resolved not to be outwitted, so hied to the spot with a basketful of small loaves, one of which he placed on every stone. In vain he tried; either his loaves were not sufficiently numerous, or some sorcery displaced them, and he gave up in despair. Of course no one expects to succeed now.

In a field adjoining are the remains of a cromlech, the altar where, at a distance from the people, the priests performed their mystic rites. The superimposed stone has slipped off, and rests against the others. These are the "Whispering Knights," and this their history:—In days of yore, when rival princes debated their claims to England's crown by dint of arms, the hostile forces were encamped hard by. Certain traitor-knights went forth to parley with others from the foe. While thus plotting, a great magician, whose power they unaccountably overlooked, transformed them all into stone, and there they stand to this day.

Not far from the temple, but on the opposite side of the road, is a solitary stone, probably the last of two rows which flanked the approach to the sacred circle. This stone was once a prince who claimed the British throne. On this spot he inquired of the magician above named what would be his destiny:

"If Long Compton you can see,  
King of England you shall be,"

answered the wise man. But he could not see it, and at once shared the fate of the "Whispering Knights." This is called the "King's stone," and so stands that, while you cannot see Long Compton from it, you can if you go forward a very little way. On some future day an armed warrior will issue from this very stone, to conquer and govern our land!

It is said that a farmer who wished to bridge over a small stream at the foot of a hill, resolved to press the "Whispering Knights" into the service; but it was almost too much for all the horse power at his command to bring them down. At length they were placed, but all they could do was not sufficient to keep them in their place. It was therefore resolved to restore them to their original post, when, lo! they who required so much to bring them down, and defied all attempts to keep them quiet, were taken back almost without an effort by a single horse! So there they stand, till they and the rest (for I believe the large circle was once composed of living men) shall return to their proper manhood.—*Notes and Queries.*